

STATE OF ALASKA

Frank H. Murkowski, Governor

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA INTERAGENCY INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

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Interagency Team to Visit Alaska Communities About Pandemic Influenza Preparations

(Ft. Richardson, AK) Starting today, representatives of several State and partner agencies will visit key Alaska communities to provide local officials with up-to-date information their community can use to prepare for a potential influenza pandemic.

“Currently, there is not an influenza pandemic in Alaska or anywhere else in the world, but with the recent spread of avian influenza in Asia, Europe and Africa, there is the possibility the virus could mutate and cause such a pandemic in the human population,” said Public Health Director Dr. Richard Mandsager. “Now is the right time for everyone to plan and prepare, before a virus develops that can be spread person to person.”

Community visits are slated for Anchorage, Mat-Su Borough, Kenai Peninsula Borough, City and Borough of Juneau and Fairbanks North Star Borough. Other communities that will receive visits include Bethel, Dillingham, North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, Nome, Unalaska, Kodiak Island Borough, Valdez, Sitka and Ketchikan.

Agencies participating in these outreach visits include Division of Public Health, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Public Safety, Department of Environmental Conservation, Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association.

“In statewide planning efforts, local governments and organizations play a central role in preparations for pandemic flu,” Dr. Mandsager said. “It’s vital that we take the initiative to meet face to face with community officials and help them prepare for this important responsibility in any way that we can.”

During the community visits the interagency team would focus on three areas on which local officials should concentrate their efforts to prepare for a possible disaster. The three areas are:

- Maintaining continuity of essential public services such as communication, transportation and utilities
- Planning for surges in the demand for hospital and other health care services
- Protecting the health of essential workers, first responders and others

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State and Federal officials are tracking the spread of avian flu worldwide and are monitoring its impacts on humans. The State of Alaska is providing information to local governments, tribes, businesses, schools, and citizens to help them prepare for the possibility of an outbreak of bird flu or a pandemic flu in Alaska.

“No one knows for sure when the next pandemic may strike or whether or not it will be related to the current Asian H5N1 avian flu virus,” Dr. Mandsager said. “Efforts are underway to plan for the complex issues and serious impact that a new influenza pandemic could cause in Alaska.”

For more information, go to www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/ or www.avianflu.alaska.gov. If you want to call and report a dead bird, or for more information on avian influenza, you can call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hotline at 1-866-5BRD-FLU (1-866-527-3358). If you want information on pandemic influenza, or other human related influenza information, you can call the Alaska Division of Public Health’s hotline at 1-888-9PAN-FLU (1-888-972-6358); Anchorage residents may call the local line at 907-334-2292.

For additional information on what the State of Alaska is doing to prepare, you can contact the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services’ Public Information Office at 907-465-8116 or the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management’s Public Information Office at 907-428-7052.

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